

The Importance of Urban & Community Forestry

To some it may sound like a contradiction of terms, but many foresters actually work in cities. Their work may not be as well known as that of their rural colleagues, but urban foresters play a vital role in the health and future of some of America's most important forests-the trees along our streets and urban river corridors, and in our parks and yards.

Every citizen wants professional police protection, a high quality fire department, and the best possible administrators of the city coffers. It is important that the welfare of our communities' tree resources be similarly entrusted to professional management.

According to studies cited by The National Arbor Day Foundation, only 39 percent of American municipalities have programs to systematically care for their publicly owned trees. Yet the health and appearance of a community's trees is one of the most important factors in determining a city's visual image and quality of life.

"Trees are vital elements in the fabric of any community," says John Rosenow, president of the Foundation. "They provide cooling shade in summer, help reduce the chill of winter winds, clean the air, reduce noise, and provide a home for songbirds, to name just a few of the benefits of trees in an urban setting."

The National Arbor Day Foundation operates the Tree City USA program to help encourage community forestry programs and provide recognition to cities and towns that meet certain standards for community tree planting and care.

Rosenow notes that every community's forestry program will be different, tailored to the needs and circumstances of its citizens and trees. Flying the flag of Tree City USA is a symbol of good urban forestry, but that symbol represents a lot of hard work. Some of the goals that city foresters seek to attain for their communities include:

1. Making the Community a Beautiful Place

Trees make life more pleasant. City forestry programs work toward giving greater vitality to neighborhoods and a unique character to the community. In turn, this attracts and retains residents and desirable industries, increasing both property values and the tax base. A well-managed city forestry program contributes to the well-being of the community through the beauty of trees.

2. Keeping Public Trees Safe

Proper selection of tree species, routine inspection, knowledgeable pruning and maintenance, control of insects and diseases, and the timely removal of dangerous or dead trees- these are some of the ways city forestry programs provide for public safety and protect people and property from falling limbs or trees.

3. Efficiency in Tree Care

With 134 trees per mile lining the streets of an average American city, a systematic approach to tree management is needed. After making a well-developed inventory of publicly owned trees, city foresters can use scheduled maintenance instead of crisis management. The result is longer life of trees. Also, more time and money can be available for planting and maintaining trees instead of removing them.

4. Community Involvement

Public support is essential for the success of an urban forestry program. Therefore, city foresters work with tree advisory boards, volunteer groups and others, as well as the media. Many conduct educational outreach programs aimed at informing home and business owners about how to care for trees on their own property.

According to Rosenow, more than 2,400 communities across the United States have been awarded Tree City USA status. They range in size from tiny Calvin, North Dakota (population 26) to Los Angeles, California (population 3.2 million). The results of the forestry programs in these communities touch the lives of more than 88 million people.

To obtain information about the Tree City USA program, write:

The National Arbor Day Foundation, 100 Arbor Avenue, Nebraska City, NE 68410.